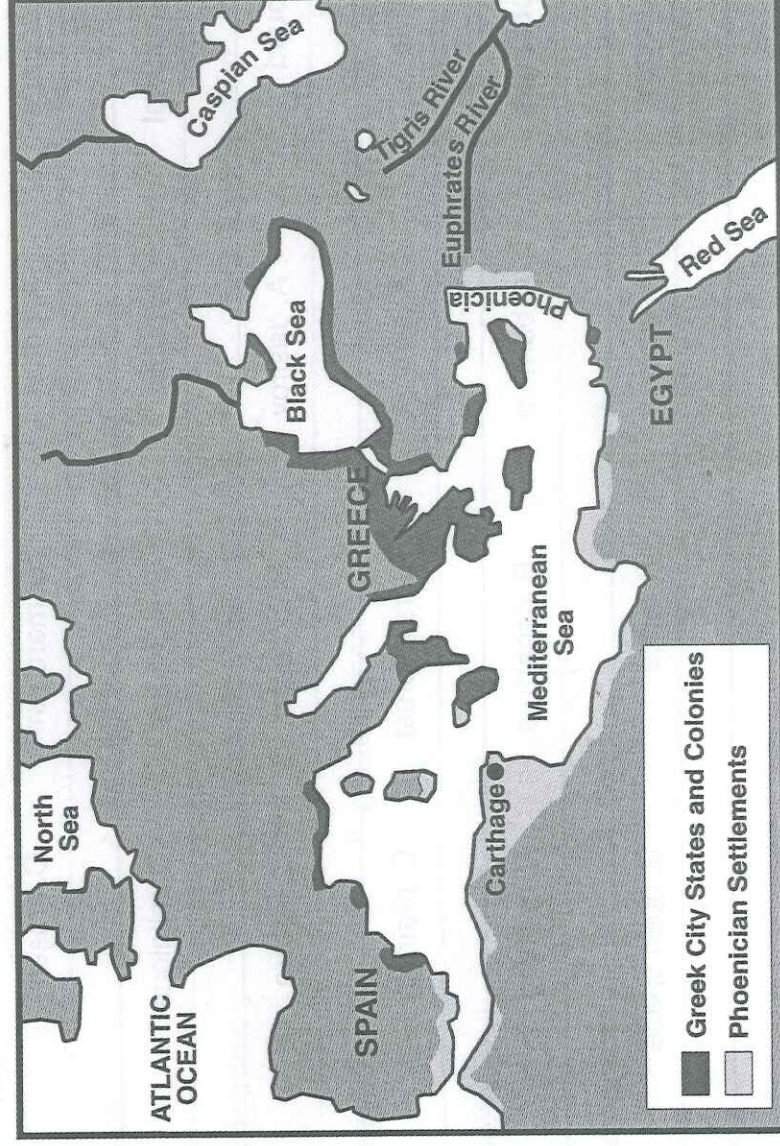


## The Aegean Civilizations

The civilizations that developed around Greece and the islands in the Aegean Sea are often called the Aegean Civilizations. While there is evidence that humans lived in Greece over 8,000 years ago, it wasn't until 3000 B.C. that the earliest signs of civilization actually began. Greek civilization can be divided into three distinct periods.

1. The **Early Period** is sometimes called the Bronze Age. This period lasted from 3000 B.C. to 1150 B.C. Many of the legends written about this time were stories that supposedly happened in this period.
  - The **Minoan** culture thrived on the island of Crete from sometime before 2000 B.C. to 1450 B.C.
  - The **Mycenaean** culture developed on the Greek mainland and reached its height about 1600 B.C. It lasted for about 400 years.
2. The **Middle Period** is sometimes called the "Dark Ages." It lasted from about 1100 B.C. until about 800 B.C. During the Middle Period, the culture declined. The people living in what we call Greece organized themselves not into one great nation, but rather into several city-states. Each city-state was a separate unit that governed itself.
3. The **Classical Period** began about 800 B.C. and lasted until 323 B.C. This is the period that includes the Golden Age of Greece when democracy, drama, philosophy, science, literature, and other accomplishments of this great culture reached their peaks. The city-states of Athens and Sparta, which represented two very different ideals, thrived during the Classical Period. The period ended with the death of Alexander the Great, who had conquered Persia and spread the Greek culture from Egypt to India. Eventually, the Romans conquered all of the land that had belonged to Greece.





## The Middle Period: Athens and Sparta

After the fall of Mycenaea, Greece entered the Middle Period, which is sometimes called the Dark Ages. It lasted from about 1100 B.C. until about 800 B.C. During the Middle Period, the culture declined. Little is known about this period in Greek history since there are no written records. We do know there were various groups of people living in villages on the mainland as well as the islands in the Aegean Sea. Since these villages were separated by mountains and the sea, there was little contact among the various villages. As a result, each village was concerned with its own needs, not caring at all about those living in other villages. Gradually, the people organized themselves into several small city-states, almost like separate nations, each called a **polis**. Each polis was a separate unit that developed its own government. It not only consisted of the city, but included the area surrounding the city as well. Each polis had a marketplace called an **agora**. An area that was higher than the rest of the polis was called an **acropolis**. A wall to protect the polis was often built.

We consider all of the city-states in Greece to be the Greek Civilization, because they shared the same language, religion, and culture. However, the Greeks living in this time were not loyal to Greece as a nation, but to the city-state in which they lived. Many city-states began to develop during the Middle Period, but the best-known and most powerful were Athens and Sparta. People from Athens were called Athenians. Those living in Sparta were Spartans. Both were on the Peloponnesian Peninsula of Greece.

Athens and Sparta were just developing during the Middle Period, and they could not have been more different. One difference between the two was the manner in which they governed themselves. In order to understand how different Athens and Sparta were, it is important to understand how government developed in the Greek city-states. Several different types of government were tried over the years by the Greeks. At one time they had leaders similar to a king, but the people thought they could govern better than one person. So they established an aristocracy. An **aristocracy** is a government by a ruling class. The ruling class in this case was the land owners. This type of government was eventually replaced by an oligarchy. An **oligarchy** is run by only a few people. In the case of the Greeks, the rulers were the wealthiest in town. Many city-states eventually abandoned this type of government and established a democracy. A **democracy** is a government run by the people who are being governed. *Demos* is a Greek word that means "people." In the Greek democracy, all citizens were able to vote and to decide how the city-state was to be run. Slaves and women were not allowed to vote or participate.

Athens had a democracy. Every Athenian man, rich or poor, was a member of an assembly, which met to discuss issues concerning Athens. Each citizen was allowed to speak and give his opinion at these assemblies. Each year a council consisting of 500 citizens was chosen by lot. The council managed the city and decided what should be discussed at the assemblies. Citizens also took turns as judges and public officials. This open-minded attitude extended into other aspects of Athenian life. Artists, writers, philosophers, architects, and scientists flourished in Athens.

Sparta, on the other hand, was ruled by two kings and a council. They did not have a democracy. This type of government worked well for Spartans who were not interested in the "finer things in life" that the Athenians pursued. Spartan life was simple. There was no art, music, poetry, or fine clothing. They cared little for ideas or new invention. Their whole existence was built around war and military discipline. Beginning at age seven, all men were trained as soldiers. They were given little food and were treated harshly to make them ready for the hardships of war. Even women were required to become strong and healthy so that they could have strong and healthy children. The Spartan army was strong and feared throughout the area.